**9th Grade ELA Summer Reading Assignment**

***Purpose:*** When I give out assignments students often ask me the question: “why do we have to do this?” This question makes me very happy. We are here for the *education* of students. It is their (your) education, and I want to give them (you) the reins to education at every available opportunity.

So, let’s answer the question “why do we do this?” Why a summer reading assignment?

Summer reading is a way for us to set the tone of the course. You’ll get a good idea of the kind of teacher I am from the books on this list. It’s also a chance for you to practice your reading skills on your own without help or assistance from a conveniently placed adult.

***Reading:*** Choose one book from the list below. Your choice should be a book that you have never read before.Read the book thoroughly from cover to cover. While you do, practice *annotating* as you read (mark the book with a pen, write notes in the margins, or put sticky notes on your favorite sections). If you are reading your book on Learning Ally then you will need to write a 500 word book report where you summarize three passages from the book that seemed especially important.

When you get back from the summer, I will check your book to see that you annotated, but DON’T annotate for me—do it for *you*. Practice “close reading.” Analyze the text like it is the Bible. Pan the words for hidden nuggets of beauty. Scour through the pages like a detective solving a murder case. Read like crazy.

**Book List**

**Ender’s Game,** *Orson Scott Card:* Andrew "Ender" Wiggin thinks he is playing computer simulated war games; he is, in fact, engaged in something far more desperate. The result of genetic experimentation, Ender may be the military genius Earth desperately needs in a war against an alien enemy seeking to destroy all human life. The only way to find out is to throw Ender into ever harsher training, to chip away and find the diamond inside, or destroy him utterly. Ender Wiggin is six years old when it begins. He will grow up fast.

**The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy**,*Douglas Adams:* Seconds before the Earth is demolished to make way for a galactic freeway, Arthur Dent is plucked off the planet by his friend Ford Prefect, a researcher for the revised edition of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* who, for the last fifteen years, has been posing as an out-of-work actor.

**The Hobbit**,*J. R. R. Tolkien:* In a sleepy village in the Shire, young Bilbo Baggins finds himself swept off on an adventure to find and steal treasure from the dragon Smaug.

**Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone,** *J.K. Rowling:* Harry Potter has never been the star of a Quidditch team. He knows no spells, has never helped to hatch a dragon, and has never worn a cloak of invisibility. All he knows is a miserable life with the Dursleys, his horrible aunt and uncle, and their abominable son, Dudley. But all that is about to change when a mysterious letter arrives by owl messenger: a letter with an invitation to an incredible place that Harry ­ and anyone who reads about him - will find unforgettable.

**Parents & guardians: To assist you in helping your student decide on what book to read this summer, you can find detailed information below each title and summary. It will advise you on the content regarding violence, sex, drug use, etc.**

**Book 1:**

**Ender’s Game,** *Orson Scott Card:* Andrew "Ender" Wiggin thinks he is playing computer simulated war games; he is, in fact, engaged in something far more desperate. The result of genetic experimentation, Ender may be the military genius Earth desperately needs in a war against an alien enemy seeking to destroy all human life. The only way to find out is to throw Ender into ever harsher training, to chip away and find the diamond inside, or destroy him utterly. Ender Wiggin is six years old when it begins. He will grow up fast.

*Information:*

**Educational Value** - Perfect discussion book, even for reluctant readers. Families can talk about if the end always justifies the means, if games desensitize kids to violence, and much more.

**Positive Messages** - The story introduces the concept of the end justifying the means, themes of loyalty and friendship, ideas about what bravery means, and complex thoughts on politics. The sheer emotional impact of this gripping read means these concepts will stick with kids long after, though there are no simple answers.

**Positive Role Models** - Ender has a gift for combat -- he fights and kills -- even though he doesn't understand the stakes. He's incredibly intuitive, bright, curious, but also troubled by his conscience and tries desperately to make sense of his role as a soldier. Petra is a strong female character who is not sexualized or dumbed down in any way. Ender's brother, Peter, engages in cruel bullying and has dangerous ideas. Other characters are a mix of "good" and "bad," and several central characters are ambiguous.

**Violence** - Violence is frequent and, in some cases, quite vicious, especially as some of it's between kids, some result in unintentional deaths. An older brother is particularly cruel to others, including the main character, and threatens to kill or injure the young brother. A few fights between kid soldiers results in serious injuries with blood. Many of the scenes during Battle School entail detailed descriptions of virtual battles. A twisted boy tortures squirrels to death by skinning them alive. Kids are led to commit genocide, albeit unknowingly.

**Sex** - Boys and girls are naked in dorms, though there's no sexual activity. There are two computer screen pranks briefly described: In one, an off-color message ("I love your butt. Let me kiss it.") is sent and attributed to someone who didn't send it. In another, a screen displays a large, animated image of male genitals, which is not described in any detail.

**Language -** Language includes lots of "hell," plus the occasional "ass," and the word "s--t" is used in one scene three times. Other teasing language and some occasional potty talk is sprinkled throughout.

**Consumerism** - None present

**Drinking, Drugs & Smoking** - None present

The information on **Ender’s Game** was found at the following website:

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/book-reviews/enders-game>

**Book 2:**

**The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy**,*Douglas Adams:* Seconds before the Earth is demolished to make way for a galactic freeway, Arthur Dent is plucked off the planet by his friend Ford Prefect, a researcher for the revised edition of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* who, for the last fifteen years, has been posing as an out-of-work actor.

PROFANITY & VIOLENCE - The Lord’s name is used in vain, and h—, bloody, d–n, a–, b–tard and s— appear a number of times.

SEXUAL CONTENT - One Guide entry mentions the triple-breasted whore of the planet Eroticon 6. As Arthur first talks to Slartibartfast, he has the strange sensation of being a man caught in the act of adultery when the woman’s husband casually walks in the room. Magratheans cater to their customers’ desires, however strange. They demonstrate this by showing a promotional piece where 500 entirely naked women are parachuting at once.

ALCOHOL: Characters, including Arthur and Ford, drink and are hung over. The Guide tells people where to find the best drink in existence and where they can get rehabilitative help afterward.

BELIEF SYSTEMS: The novel contains a number of references to evolution, including the suggestion that man is descended from apes, various beings crawled out of primordial sludge and certain patterns learned to copy themselves and thereby started life in the universe. Slartibartfast tells Arthur that he and his people actually made the Earth, which was commissioned and paid for by mice. The great computer, Deep Thought, is created to provide the answer to Life, the Universe and Everything. Philosophers fear they will be out of work if they spend their lives pondering God when a machine like Deep Thought can spit out God’s phone number. Ford calls the machine “messianic” when Deep Thought goes on about the computer that will come after it, whose parameters Deep Thought is not worthy to calculate. He says the new machine will be called Earth. When placed in someone’s ear, a creature called the Babel fish allows the person to hear in any language. According to the Guide, some say there’s no way a creature so amazingly useful could have evolved purely by chance. They say its existence proves God’s existence, and thus disproves God’s existence. The Guide continues to lay out the argument some scholars use: God would say He refuses to prove His own existence because proof denies faith, and He is nothing without faith. A man then argues with God that He has proved himself with the Babel fish’s existence, and therefore by God’s own arguments, He doesn’t exist. God then states He hadn’t thought of that, and He disappears in a puff of logic. According to the Guide, this theory is the central theme of author Oolon Colluphid’s bestseller, Well That About Wraps It Up for God.

The information on **The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy** was found at the following website:

<https://www.pluggedin.com/book-reviews/hitchhikers-guide-to-galaxy/>

**Book 3:**

**The Hobbit**,*J. R. R. Tolkien:* In a sleepy village in the Shire, young Bilbo Baggins finds himself swept off on an adventure to find and steal treasure from the dragon Smaug.

**Educational Value -** Dig deeper into J.R.R. Tolkien's world, and readers will find out more about his made-up languages and runes, as well as art inspired by this book and the Lord of the Rings trilogy. Younger readers will also build up their vocabulary, so keep a dictionary handy. Words like "flummoxed" should be looked up so kids get the full enjoyment out of Tolkien's beautiful writing

**Positive Messages -** Shows how greed for riches can blind you and that peace is more important than shiny possessions. Also, that giving up the comforts of home is worth it for adventure, but it's always nice to find home again. Throughout the book, a big value is placed on bravery, friendship, and using brains over brawn.

**Positive Role Models -** Bilbo is hired as a thief and does do some stealing from enemies, but mostly he shows bravery, cunning, and loyalty to his group of travelers while helping them get out of a number of sticky situations. Most heroically, he takes a stand against Thorin, hoping to show him that his greed for gold isn't worth spilling blood over. Gandalf is a mentor for the dwarves and Bilbo, advising them on how to reach their goal and avoid danger but also imparting much wisdom along the way.

**Violence -** Fights with a dragon, trolls, giant spiders, wood elves, goblins, and evil wolves. The dwarves and Bilbo are captured a few times, whipped once, almost cooked once, and strung upside down to be eaten later. Swords and arrows kill in a big battle that includes some sad deaths. There's talk of how a dragon destroyed whole towns of men and dwarves around his hoard. Bilbo has a creepy encounter in the dark with Gollum, who keeps thinking about how he'd like to eat him. Few truly gory details except a goblin head and a wolf skin propped up on a gate.

**Sex -** None present

**Language -** "Hell" (spelled "'ell") and "curse it!"

**Consumerism** - None present

**Drinking, Drugs & Smoking -** Lots of tobacco smoking with pipes -- trying to get big rings and magically float them. Drinking, too, by dwarves, elves, and Gandalf. Two elves fall asleep drinking.

The information on **The Hobbit** was found at the following website:

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/book-reviews/the-hobbit>

**Book 4:**

**Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone,** *J.K. Rowling:* Harry Potter has never been the star of a Quidditch team. He knows no spells, has never helped to hatch a dragon, and has never worn a cloak of invisibility. All he knows is a miserable life with the Dursleys, his horrible aunt and uncle, and their abominable son, Dudley. But all that is about to change when a mysterious letter arrives by owl messenger: a letter with an invitation to an incredible place that Harry ­ and anyone who reads about him - will find unforgettable.

**Educational Value -** Author borrows many magical creatures, people, and concepts from other fantasy traditions and puts her own spin on them: Nicholas and Perenelle Flamel and their Sorcerer's (or Philosopher's) Stone, wands and potions, unicorns, goblins, centaurs, dragons, giants, trolls, and more.

**Positive Messages -** Friendship and bravery are more important than books and cleverness. There are many kinds of bravery, and it's even braver to stand up to your friends than to your enemies.

**Positive Role Models -** Main characters Harry, Ron, and Hermione, models of dedicated friends, are rewarded for their bravery. They are usually punished for rule-breaking but also get away with quite a bit, especially when Harry gets his hands on an invisibility cloak. Harry always means well, though, and just like the sorting hat says, he has a "thirst to prove himself." Dumbledore (Hogwarts' eccentric headmaster) is a wonderful mentor to Harry, showing up with sage advice at just the right times.

**Diverse Representations -** There's a little diversity at Hogwarts. Lee Jordan is described as having dreadlocks, and the Patil twins are sorted into the Gryffindor house. Some diverse family structures are described: Harry lives with his aunt and uncle and Neville with his grandmother. Harry and Ron bond over growing up with second-hand clothes and wishing they had more money; Ron's insecurity over being from a poorer family comes up a lot. Women have prominent roles at Hogwarts: Professor McGonagall and Professor Sprout are both heads of houses. There are two girls on the Gryffindor quidditch team. There's only one larger-sized character who isn't a bad guy, and that's Hagrid. Lots of negative language around the size of Dudley and his father and Malfoy's Slytherin friends Crabbe and Goyle.

**Violence & Scariness -** Kids are in peril often, but it's mostly at the hands of fantasy creatures. A three-headed dog threatens Harry and friends. Harry and Draco see a dead and bloody unicorn and are chased by a hooded figure in the Forbidden Forest. Harry and friends fight a troll and knock it unconscious, are nearly crushed by a constricting plant and pummeled by a life-size chess board. Some minor injuries: a dragon bite that swells up and a broken wrist after a fall off a broom. Some bullying and a fistfight. One minor character dies. Mostly friendly ghosts roam the halls; the ghost Nearly Headless Nick shows how he got the name. Talk of Harry's childhood with his Muggle family, how his cousin bullied and hit him and his aunt and uncle neglected him. Harry's uncle points a gun at Hagrid. Flashback to the (bloodless) deaths of Harry's parents and much discussion about how they died and the one who killed them.

**Sex -** None present

**Language -** One instance of "damn" and a "Good Lord."

**Consumerism** - None present

**Drinking, Drugs & Smoking -** Hagrid mentions having way too much to drink one night and giving away a dangerous secret. At another time Hagrid carries and drinks from a flask, and at Christmas dinner he drinks heavily and kisses Professor McGonagall on the cheek. Vernon Dursley is served brandy after a trying day. Witches drink sherry, and someone smokes a long pipe at a wizard bar. Baby dragons drink a mixture of brandy and chicken blood.

The information on **Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone** was found at the following website:

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/book-reviews/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerers-stone-harry-potter-book-1>